

DAVID HALBERT

February 28, 2012

Eastend Houston

Houston Mooring

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Born in Waco, TX. Moved to Pasadena at 2 years of age. Studied at Houston Public schools. Texas A&M and then UH Law school. Licensed attorney. Born Oct 30, 1943. Wanted to be an airline pilot from much younger. Wanted to enroll in the Air Force after A&M. Enrolled and started flying planes but before graduating found out a problem in eyes during the physical signaling an end to Air Force career. Also scheduled to get married to the daughter of the President of Houston Mooring who was looking to hire someone. Started working as a dispatcher.

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Houston Mooring provides service to steam ships by sending out gangs of longshoreman and motorboats and take the lines from the ships and put them ashore. Petrochemical port. Most petrochemical docks are not traditional wharfs where a ship can pull up alongside and drop its lines to a dock. A T-head dock where ships drop the lines down to the boat that then take them either offshore mooring facilities or to the bank. Send a gang of 4 longshoreman to a ship.

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Started at the time father was born. History has been lost. Mr. Baker in the business, a Dutchman, a German and father in law were working during WW2 and made either victory ships or liberty ships. Very fast built ships that were not too big and not too seaworthy. Built at the Houston ship channel. Came to work as a dispatcher. Worked on weekends only. Worked 40 hours on the weekend. Worked part time for father moving pianos. Had to then join the military, joined the Texas National Guard. Went for active duty after a year. Father in law retired then and was elected Secretary treasurer of company and then VP and then President of Houston Mooring. Dispatcher would talk to the man on radio. No sophisticated radio. Agents would call and inform of ships coming in. When ship was boarded, pilots would call and inform. Based on that would be able to estimate time of arrival and would then call the crew. Payroll would be based on the log that also had to be kept at time of dispatch.

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Houston Mooring hires longshoreman from a hiring call. When back from the army, was elected as secretary treasurer by the board of directors. For two years did all the accounting work, had to go aboard ships and get receipts signed. System of zones based

on distance from office and the farther it is, the more is paid. The size of the ship is also taken into account. Premium for overtime work, holiday work and weekend work. All factors go into deciding payroll for longshoreman.

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Can track a ship using AIS. There are screens in the dispatch office, each ship is labeled and they move across the screen periodically. Have a private company band radio. Two mooring companies in Houston.

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Whoever operates the ship, have relationships with the agent. Based on public relations work, or salesmanship.

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Always had three active officers. While roles tend to fit personalities, jobs are essentially the same. Have a daughter but isn't interested in the business. Wife passed away in '03. she worked in the summer and Christmas holidays at the office.

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Business is potentially dangerous. Constantly try and keep employees informed about safety measures. Personal injuries have improved over the years. In the mid 80s. were averaging 17 reportable injuries a year. some serious injuries. Lost employees to injuries. Got a citation from insurance companies for going a whole year without any injuries. Sign of culture change. Use boats and trucks and wenchers more and human muscle less than the 80s. Ships and lines are bigger, distances are more, yet injury rate is less. Have a safety consultancy company. Full time program for looking after the docks. Lack of maintenance at the dock causes injuries.

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Back in the 60s, safety was seldom considered. Union was resistant, company wasn't enthusiastic about safety. There was a "macho culture" among longshoreman, did not want interference in their job. Injuries were considered an occupational hazard. Realized in the late 80s, that this could not continue. Couldn't afford it,

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Back then, there was a working crew of 50 men so 17 injuries is more than one a month. Most are smaller injuries but still prevents them from tying up a ship. Many back injuries which had to result in surgery. Incapacitated for a year. Have had compensation under Longshore Harbor Workers Act. Federal act and is pretty generous. Benefits are good. All expenses are covered. Full medical coverage.

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They are covered by the company, employee pays nothing. Very expensive. With reduction in injuries, reduction in rates. In 1991, they are very active in the safety and very insistent that all their covered companies have a safety program in place.

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The other ports employ differently. Employees here are longshoreman and are covered by the Longshore Harbor Workers Act. There are no dry cargo ships, all ships require boat operators, so under the law they are classified as seamen and are covered by the Jones Act. If you spend a third of your time on the water and assigned to one fleet of ships, you are a seamen and are subject to the Jones Act. Because of hiring call, they are not assigned to a single fleet, so employees are legally longshoreman. Use ILA labor docks, so from a labor peace perspective, need to be longshoreman and ILA to work.

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ILA on the east coast was influenced by the mafia. Was not a big secret. In Houston, liked to put up a front that they were connected. Was a way to wield power. Over the years, it has evolved. East coast has changed considerably. The Gulf coast has changed more. South Atlantic and gulf coast district have new leadership. Education level, quality has made a big difference. Longshoreman lost a lot of work to non union competition. Saw that cooperation was the only way to retain work. Used to be lots of stevedoring companies in the Houston area in the 80s. But started reducing. Number of longshoreman ha reduced drastically.

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During the strike there were many days without work. Did not go on the docks then, had goon squad, watching and would throw tacks and nails and were very menacing. While strike was on there were no cargo operations going on. Longshoreman lost all their work. Remember being at the office with nothing to do. That was the beginning of the non union movt. But took another 10-15 years to get moving. Still have non union docks, non union stevedores operating within the port now.

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Saw it as management. Did not sympathize with what was going on. Some did. There was this culture of longshoreman brotherhood, some did not like losing their job. Had to lay off half the employees. Everyone who was laid off volunteered. Management did not sympathize with the strike. Looked at it as an "unjust money grabbing" method. Once the strike was over, did not lose anybody over it. It was an ILA Atlantic Coast strike.

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Always wondered how long it can keep going, how long can ships keep coming to the docks. Keep waiting for the invention that would tie ships up automatically. It would require a system that would have to be used worldwide. Don't see anything different happening but only see ships growing.

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Employees, size, docks, Port of Houston has all expanded. Size of the ships are expanding dramatically. Houston is limited by draft restriction and size of ship channel.

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Lines are bigger and come from higher up. Have 12 boats, Can hardly keep up with account so use ledgers. The communication between us and the towboats and the men is instantaneous and very accurate. Back then, sometimes did not know where a ship was. Was always guessing. Used to have men who would have to report immediately if they saw a ship. Longshoreman spend much less time waiting on a ship. Made their work a lot more efficient.

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Have a communication with the pilots' dispatch team. Started an experimental look with another AIS system in New Orleans.

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Always been an arcane business. Business is unique and not very well know. "Do the same thing everyday and it is always different."

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Initially came to work starting Friday at 3 pm and would work until 11pm. Sat at 7am and work until 11 pm. Sunday back at 7 -11. Did that for over a year. After that partners traded off working Thursday night. Gave an opportunity to keep an eye on what goes on in the night. Worked all night for 10-15 years once every third week. Now work a 9-5 job.

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All ships must be tied up. That is a safety priority. Back then, people would miss jobs. Sometimes only 2 in a gang would show up.

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Close knit community. Over the years have developed personal relationships. There is a good camaraderie. All people have a common interest. Common goal to work towards is the same.

